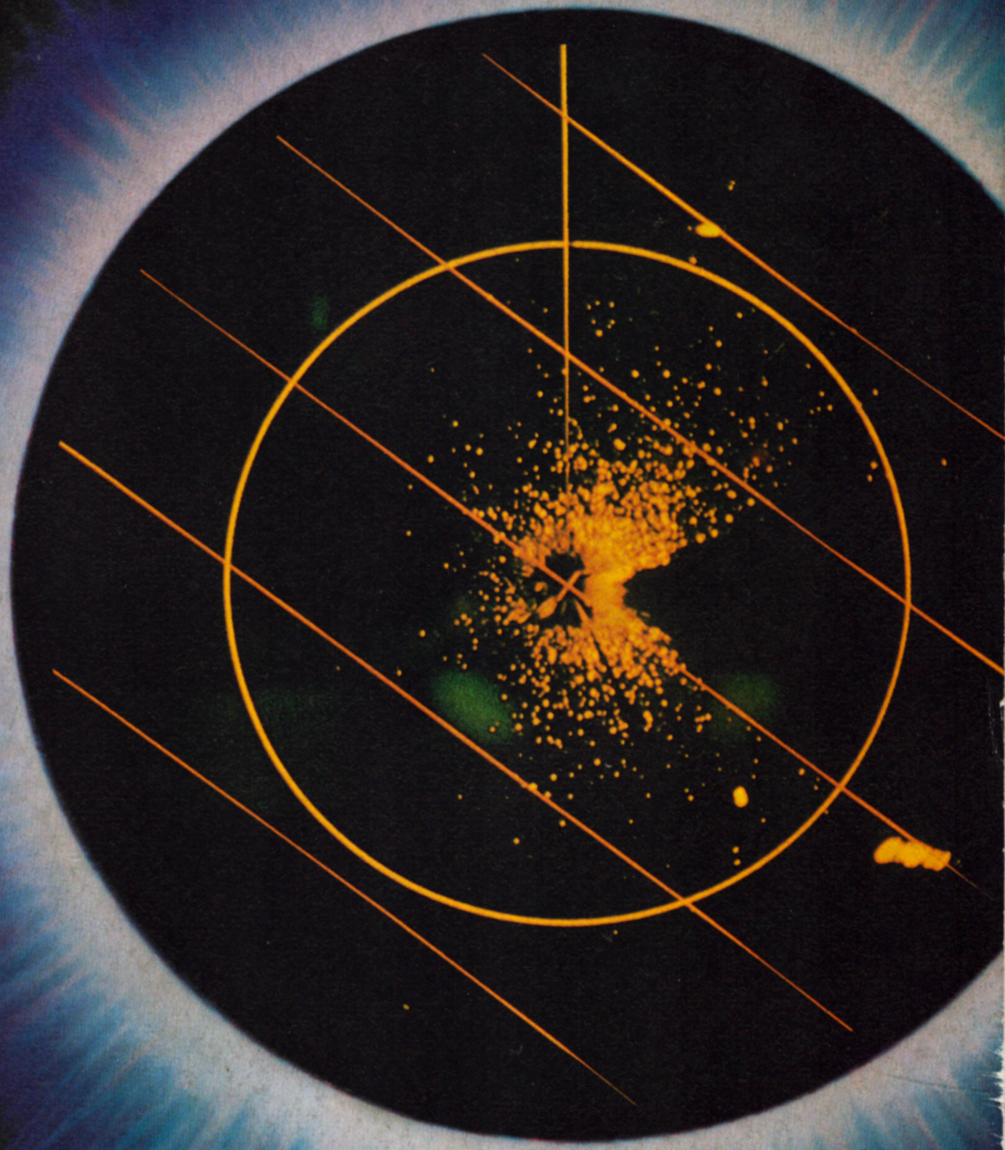
60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

127

UFOs and radar
The Chinese puzzle
Did Christ survive the cross?
Houdini and the mediums
Two-way timeslips



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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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In next week's issue
Every schoolchild believes that Christopher Columbus discovered America – but there are many other contenders for the honour, including the Irish, Icelanders and even Japanese and Chinese; we present the fascinating evidence in **Old New World**. Was **Houdini**, the famous 'medium-baiter', himself a psychic? There is evidence that he was not only a species of 'metal bender' but that he also possessed telepathic powers. **Wilhelm Reich** was an influential occultist who believed that he could trap the energy expended during sexual intercourse – and use it to create life from inanimate matter. And in **UFOs/Radar** we assess the role of 'angels' – anomalous blips – that confuse the issue when ufologists have used radar. Lastly, in **Prieuré de Sion** we sum up the complex mystery surrounding Rennes-le-Château.
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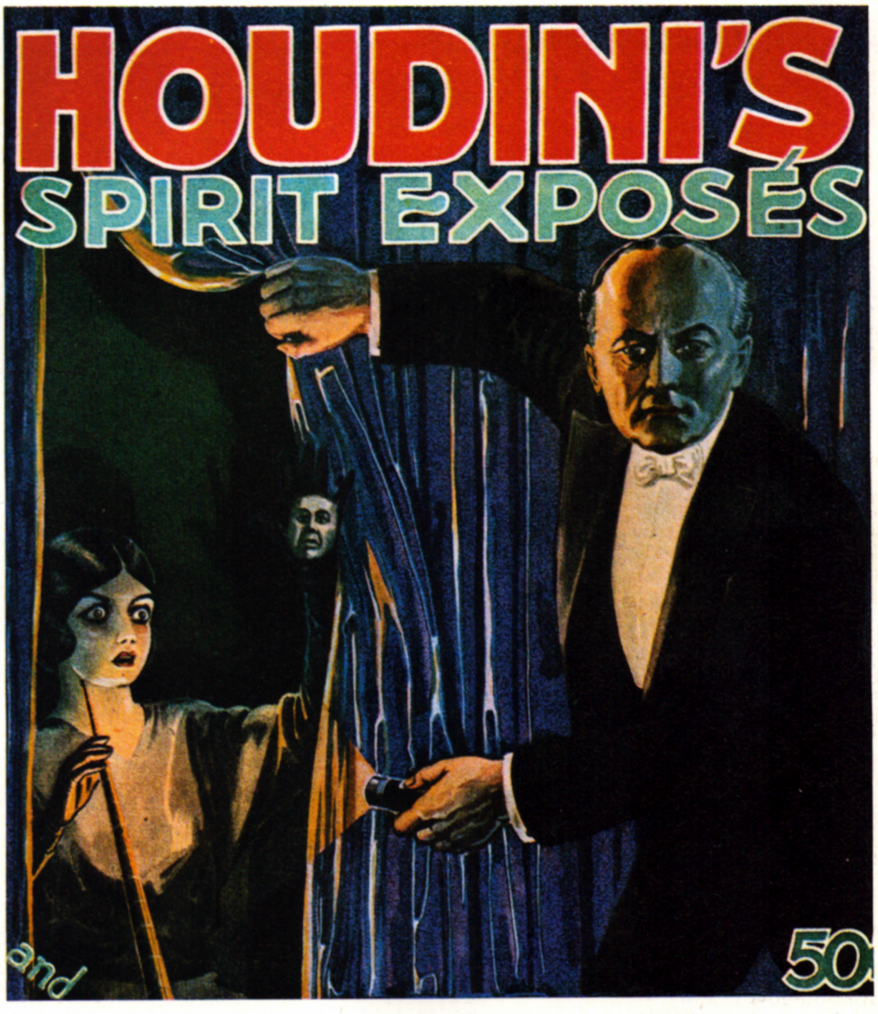
Houdini was the greatest escapologist of all time – but he is also famous for unmasking fraudulent mediums. Many believe this grew into an obsessive desire to expose all mediums. BRIAN INGLIS assesses the true motives for Houdini's fixation



Caught in the act

IN 1924 A CONTEST took place in which Harry Houdini, established as the leading stage magician of his era, was for the first and only time defeated. But he did not admit defeat; on the contrary, he claimed to have exposed his opponent, the Spiritualist medium 'Margery', as a fraud, as he had exposed so many others. But in this he lied; as unfortunately by then – he had just entered his fifties – he was all too prone to do.

Houdini was born in Wisconsin in the United States in 1874, the son of Hungarian immigrants Rabbi Samuel Weiss and his wife Cecilia, who had named him Erich. As a teenager he read the memoirs of Robert-Houdin, the most famous magician of the previous era; and at once, resolving to take on his hero's mantle, he adopted the name 'Houdini' and took his act on tour.

It was not long before he realised that in using Houdin's name he had made a mistake, for he was going to be even greater. It was too late to change his stage name, but he wrote *The unmasking of Robert-Houdin*, which effectively demolished the Frenchman's reputation. It gave a clue to Houdini's own character, for when Maurice Sardina went over the same ground, he realised that, although Houdini had indeed uncovered some of Houdin's weaknesses, he had also been unscrupulous in distorting the facts to fit his case.

During his lifetime, Harry Houdini became a household word all over the world – for his legendary escapes from all manner of confinement (left: a German book cover, showing Houdini about to free himself from a fearsome array of manacles), and also for his exposure of Spiritualist phenomena (above). Supporters of the Spiritualist movement, however, pointed out that reproducing the phenomena by trickery did not necessarily detract from the authenticity of the mediums' manifestations

Houdini made his name as an escapologist, and in that capacity he was supreme. By 1918 he had escaped from just about every form of confinement that ingenuity could devise, and was beginning to look for alternative sources of income – and fame. He had starred in several films and thought in terms of film-making as a career. But he had contracts to honour in Britain as an escapologist, which he had signed before the war, and in 1920 he arrived to fulfil them. It was then that he realised an old ambition: to meet the creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Houdini took an immediate liking to one another. 'Apart from his amazing courage, he was remarkable for his cheery urbanity in everyday life,' Doyle was to recall after Houdini's death. 'One could not wish a better companion so long as one was with him.' When

one was not with him, however, Houdini 'might do and say the most unexpected things'. Unexpected, that is, by Doyle, who found it hard to believe that somebody with whom he got on so well could openly despise him behind his back. For much as he liked Doyle, Houdini thought him hopelessly gullible in his dealings with Spiritualist mediums – who at that time flourished as never before, thanks to the demand for their services created by the deaths of so many loved ones on the Western Front.

On the subject of Spiritualism Houdini was, at this period in his life, ambivalent. He had been so passionately devoted to his mother that he was to say of her in the introduction to his *A magician among the spirits* (1924): 'If God in His infinite wisdom ever sent an angel upon Earth in human form it was my mother.' After her death in 1913 he longed to communicate with her, and sat with several mediums in the hope that his mother would 'come through'. But she never did – not, at least, in a way that satisfied him, although Lady Doyle maintained that she had brought him a message from her. There would always be something that aroused his suspicion, such as the fact that his mother's alleged spirit would address him as 'Harry', which she never had in life.

He became increasingly interested in 'physical mediums' from a practical point of view: assuming they were fraudulent, how did they produce their materialisations? His magician's imagination was caught by this question; however, for a short time Doyle seems to have persuaded him that physical mediums were worth investigating, not just to catch them cheating, but to see whether there might not indeed be some psychic force involved, as yet unexplained.

Above: Robert-Houdin, the French conjurer whose name Houdini took, in modified form, as a mark of esteem

Below left: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with Lady Doyle and their family. The Doyles were committed Spiritualists who believed that Houdini was himself psychic

Below: Houdini shows how easy it is to fake a 'spirit' photograph as he apparently communes with Abraham Lincoln

As it happened, the celebrated Marthe Beraud, better known under her pseudonym 'Eva C' (see page 2134), was in London being tested by the Society for Psychical Research. On 21 June 1920 Houdini went to a seance where he was able to watch two expert investigators, E.J. Dingwall and W. Baggally, put Eva C through a carefully controlled trial.

Eva's speciality was materialising strange – apparently two-dimensional – human forms and faces. This she had been doing at seances for 15 years, carefully monitored and photographed by such experienced psychical researchers as Professor Charles Richet, Baron Schrenck-Nötzing and Dr Gustave Geley. Although her powers were gradually

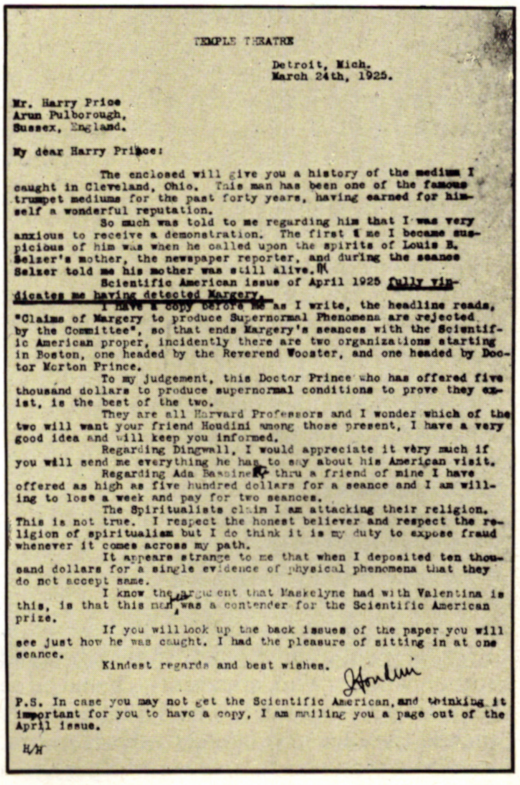
waning – and she had little success in her London trials – Houdini happened to be present on one of her better days, and he wrote an account of the sitting to Doyle the following morning.

Eva C, he said, had been made to drink a cup of coffee and eat some cake (he assumed they wanted 'to fill her up': in fact, it was a precaution against her having swallowed things before the seance – butter muslin, for example – and regurgitating them as 'ectoplasm'). After she had been undressed, sewn into tights, and her face covered with a veil to make it impossible for her to disgorge objects from anywhere in her body, she manifested 'some froth-like substance, inside of net, 'twas long, about five inches [13 centimetres]'; then 'a white, plaster-looking affair over her right eye', and 'something that looked like a small face, say four inches [10 centimetres] in circumference'. Finally, she

> asked permission to remove something in her mouth, show her hands empty, and took out what appeared to be a rubberish substance, which she disengaged, showed us plainly, we held the electric torch, all saw it plainly, when, presto! it vanished. It was a surprise effect indeed!

Doyle would doubtless receive a detailed report later, wrote Houdini, adding: 'I found it highly interesting.' Well might Houdini have found it 'highly interesting'. He was an experienced enough magician to realise that there was no ready explanation for the ectoplasmic manifestation he had witnessed. He also hoped at the time to visit W.J. Crawford, the Belfast engineer who had investigated the Goligher girls, especially the most gifted medium of the family, Kathleen Goligher, more thoroughly than any other researcher.

Houdini was on friendly terms with many of those whose beliefs he professed to despise, such as the Conan Doyles and the flamboyant psychical researcher Harry Price, with whom he kept up a lively correspondence (right). A few of the mediums whom he exposed as frauds were willing to confess all and even, as in the case of Anna Clark Benninghoffer (below), pose for a satirical photograph with Houdini – the 'scourge of the Spiritualists'. This seems to argue that, whatever else he was, the magician was a man of considerable charisma



TEMPLE THEATRE

Detroit, Mich.
March 24th, 1925.

Mr. Harry Price
Arun Pulborough,
Sussex, England.

My dear Harry Price:

The enclosed will give you a history of the medium I caught in Cleveland, Ohio. This man has been one of the famous trumpet mediums for the past forty years, having earned for himself a wonderful reputation.

So much was told to me regarding him that I was very anxious to receive a demonstration. The first time I became suspicious of him was when he called upon the spirits of Louis E. Selzer's mother, the newspaper reporter, and during the seance Selzer told me his mother was still alive.

Scientific American issue of April 1925 fully vindicates me having detected Margery.

I have a copy before me as I write, the headline reads, "Claims of Margery to produce Supernormal Phenomena are rejected by the Committee", so that ends Margery's seances with the Scientific American proper, incidently there are two organizations starting in Boston, one headed by the Reverend Wooster, and one headed by Doctor Morton Prince.

To my judgement, this Doctor Prince who has offered five thousand dollars to produce supernormal conditions to prove they exist, is the best of the two.

They are all Harvard Professors and I wonder which of the two will want your friend Houdini among those present, I have a very good idea and will keep you informed.

Regarding Dingwall, I would appreciate it very much if you will send me everything he has to say about his American visit.

Regarding Ada Besinnet thru a friend of mine I have offered as high as five hundred dollars for a seance and I am willing to lose a week and pay for two seances.

The Spiritualists claim I am attacking their religion. This is not true. I respect the honest believer and respect the religion of spiritualism but I do think it is my duty to expose fraud whenever it comes across my path.

It appears strange to me that when I deposited ten thousand dollars for a single evidence of physical phenomena that they do not accept same.

I know the argument that Maskelyne had with Valentina is this, is that this man was a contender for the Scientific American prize.

If you will look up the back issues of the paper you will see just how he was caught. I had the pleasure of sitting in at one seance.

Kindest regards and best wishes.

Houdini

P.S. In case you may not get the Scientific American, and thinking it important for you to have a copy, I am mailing you a page out of the April issue.

H/W

Houdini seemed impressed by what he had heard of Crawford's investigations. 'It is certainly a wonderful affair,' he wrote to him, 'and there is no telling how far all this may lead.' But as he had to return to the United States, he contented himself with asking Crawford for some of the photographs he had taken showing the ectoplasm exuding from Kathleen Goligher, and also the effects of her psychokinetic powers.

Not long after he returned to the United States, however, Houdini began to exploit the 'tricks' of the mediums by giving public demonstrations of them, as a profitable diversion from escapology. Soon he emerged as the great scourge of the Spiritualists, taking it upon himself to expose fraudulent mediums up and down the country. And when in 1923 he was invited to write articles on the subject for the *Scientific American* – although his commitments prevented him writing them – his suggestion that the journal should sponsor an investigation into mediumship, in which he would assist, was accepted.

The *Scientific American* offered a reward of $2500 for 'the first physical manifestations of a psychic nature produced under scientific control'; Mrs Mina Crandon, the wife of a Boston surgeon – who, as 'Margery', was to become the most celebrated of American mediums in the period – took up the challenge. Dr William McDougall, professor of psychology at Harvard, Dr Daniel Comstock, a physicist formerly of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Walter Franklin Prince, research officer of the American Society for Psychical Research, and Hereward Carrington, the most experienced of

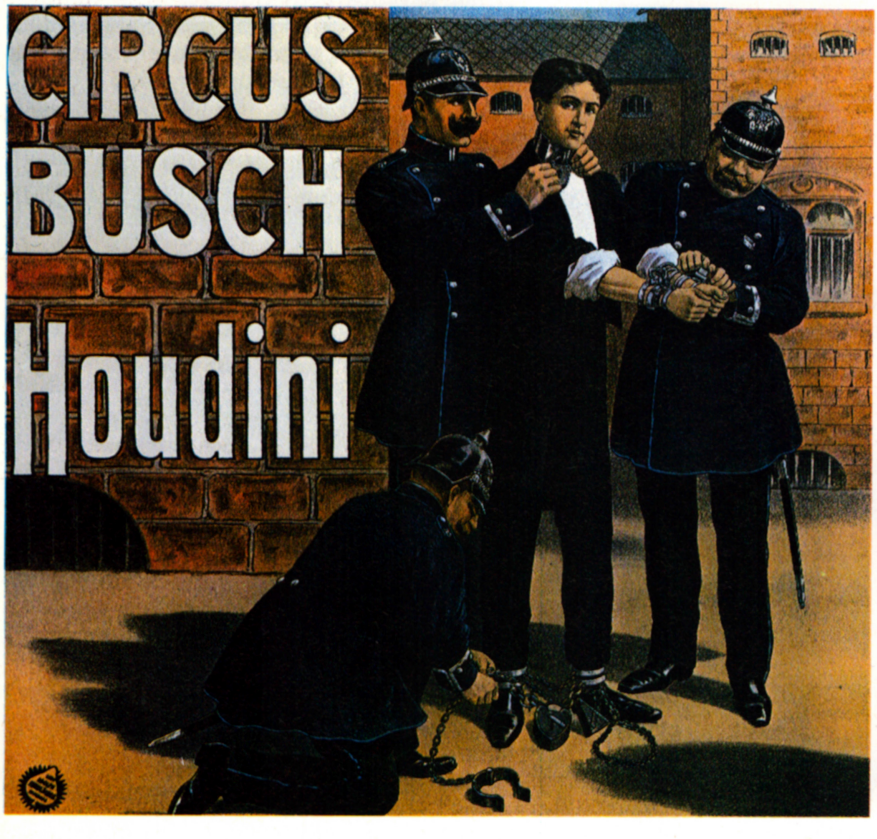
American psychical researchers, were appointed, along with Houdini, to carry out the investigation. Houdini, however, could not attend the early seances as he was on tour; he was mortified to hear that the *Scientific American*'s nominee as secretary to the committee, J. Malcolm Bird, had decided that Margery's materialisations were genuine, and that she was likely to win the award.

Houdini had been promoting his forthcoming *A magician among the spirits* on tour by boasting that he could expose any medium as fraudulent, and backing his claim with bets. Of Margery he told the publisher of the *Scientific American*: 'I will forfeit a thousand dollars if I do not detect her if she resorts to trickery.' By this time Houdini had convinced himself that all materialisations must be fakes, and now became obsessed with proving that Margery was a fraud.

Houdini the fraud?

For once, Houdini was outwitted. Margery's spirit 'control', or 'guide', was her dead brother Walter (who, apparently, behaved in the spirit as he had in life – badly) who clearly relished the idea of a contest with Houdini. Houdini's plan was to enclose Margery in a box made to his specifications by his assistant James Collins; it looked like an old-fashioned steam bath, with a hole at the top out of which her head protruded, and holes at either side so that her hands could be held. Hardly had the seance begun when the whole contraption burst apart, as if exploded by a small bomb. And when she was re-installed, the voice of Walter accused Houdini of sabotaging the experiment. He had, claimed Walter, interfered with the box in which was the bell that Margery was to try to ring. Sure enough, a small rubber eraser had been inserted, presumably by Houdini, to prevent the bell sounding. Round one to Margery – or to Walter?

Houdini's escapes from handcuffs, chains, ropes and locked containers of all kinds were so spectacular and considered to be so 'impossible' that his skills were widely thought to be paranormal, even diabolical, in origin (right: a cartoon showing Houdini as the Devil after his escape from Liverpool jail in 1904). He issued a general invitation to the locksmiths, police and even other stage magicians of the world to confine him successfully, but he always escaped. He took up every challenge and took part in every form of entertainment, such as the circus (below) and always emerged the winner. But did he have paranormal powers, or was he simply a particularly well-rehearsed performer?



For the next seance, Houdini and Collins reinforced the lid of the cabinet in which Margery was installed; but again Walter came through with his usual flow of words, which the notetaker deemed unprintable: 'Houdini! You – blackguard! You have put a rule in the cabinet.' And in the cabinet, which Houdini was supposed to have searched and found empty, there was indeed a telescopic rule. No doubt had Margery caused objects to move she would have been accused of doing so by working the rule with her mouth.

But even if she could have conveyed the ruler to her mouth, while her hands remained outside the cabinet, to have used it to move the objects at a distance, and to start the bell ringing in the box, would have been impracticable, as the ruler was only 2 feet (60 centimetres) long. The most plausible explanation was that Houdini had had it put in the box as a last resort in case he could not detect her in more obvious 'tricks'. And according to one of his biographers, Lindsay Gresham, Houdini's assistant Collins later admitted that he had put it in the cabinet himself: 'The boss told me to do it; 'e wanted to fix her good.'

A later biographer of Houdini, the well-known magician (and sceptic) Milbourne Christopher, was to cast doubt on the story on the ground that it had been spread by a man with a grudge against Houdini; in Christopher's opinion, the story of Collins's confession was 'sheer fiction'. Yet Christopher himself disclosed how, at this time, Houdini had cheated his fellow investigators,

and the public. During the seances, Houdini had asked and received permission to take photographs, to discover, he hoped, how Margery played her 'tricks'; he had asked a friend to have prints made from the negatives, saying 'she's the slickest ever.' The prints showed nothing suspicious, but one of them displayed what looked like a halo around Margery's head. As mediums often claimed to be able to impose such effects on negatives, Houdini suppressed the picture, telling his friend that Spiritualists might claim it proved her psychic capabilities and adding: 'She's a fake: why should I help build up her following?'

Claims and counter-claims

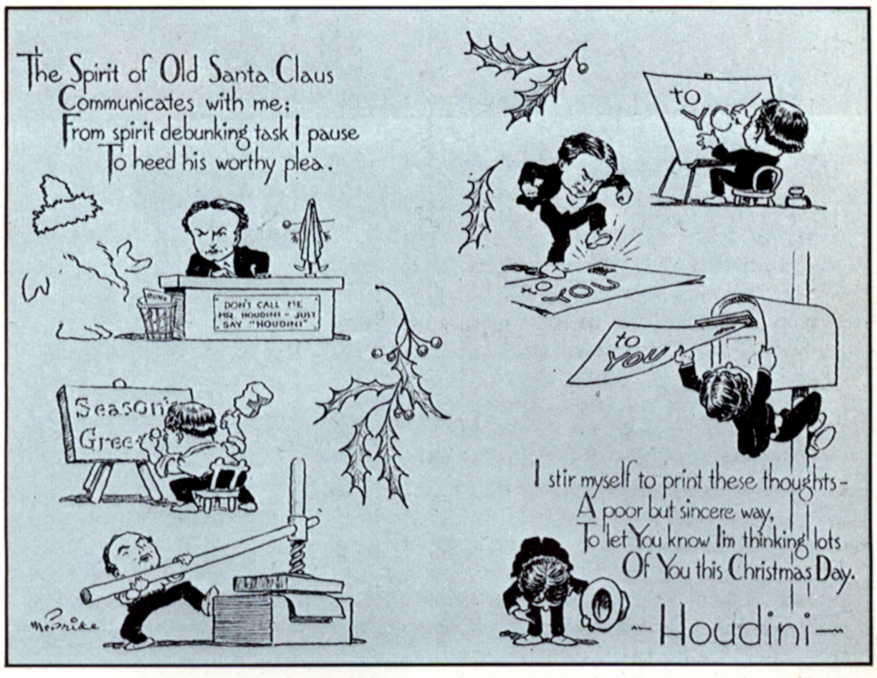
The *Scientific American* committee was divided: Bird and Carrington were sure that Margery had proved her psychic powers; Prince and McDougall thought she must be using trickery, but could not fathom how; Comstock accepted the reality of the phenomena, but refused to endorse them unless they could be explained in terms of electromagnetism. To the irritation of his colleagues on the committee, however, Houdini resumed his tour of the halls, claiming that he had exposed Margery. But his failure to expose the medium had clearly annoyed him, for when given another opportunity a few months later to try again, he accepted. And magnanimously, the Crandons consented to his trying again.

The new chief investigator was Dr Henry McComas, a psychologist at Princeton University, and Houdini, who, by that time, had learned caution, told him to go to a seance and report back what Margery did – 'the lady is subtle and changes her methods like any dextrous sleight-of-hand performer' – so that he would have time to work out how to duplicate her feats. McComas reported that Margery was now performing her feats while enclosed in a glass case. They had been spectacular, including the levitation of objects outside the case. Baffled, Houdini asked for time to decide how he could do what Margery was doing; but before he was ready, McComas had abandoned his investigation and returned to Princeton.

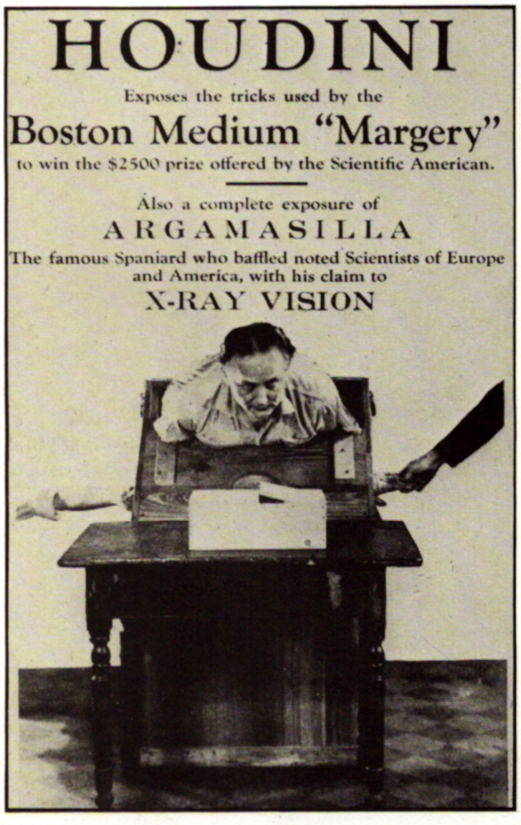
All the indications are that Houdini was in the grip of paranoia about mediums. *A magician among the spirits* is often cited by sceptics as if, because it is a first-hand source, it can be relied upon. In fact it is a mass of inaccuracies, laced with distortions – as Walter Franklin Prince was to show in *The enchanted boundary* (1930). Prince greatly admired Houdini: 'I knew him well,' he wrote, 'and the world seemed poorer when his big heart and eager brain were stilled.' But even he had to admit that *A magician among the spirits* was 'strewn with blunders' and he listed just some of them, filling two pages.

In 1926 an alleged spirit message came through at Conan Doyle's home circle: 'Houdini is doomed, doomed, doomed!' Other Spiritualists reported receiving similar communications. On 24 October one of Houdini's allies in the campaign against mediums was sitting in his room when a picture of Houdini, which the magician had given him, crashed to the floor. 'Maybe,' he wrote anxiously, 'there is something in these psychic phenomena, after all.' A week later Houdini was dead.

Was Houdini merely a stage magician – or was he actually psychic? *See page 2554*


The Spirit of Old Santa Claus
Communicates with me;
From spirit debunking task I pause
To heed his worthy plea.
DON'T CALL ME MR HOUDINI - JUST SAY "HOUDINI"
to YOU
to you
to you
I stir myself to print these thoughts -
A poor but sincere way,
To let You know I'm thinking lots
Of You this Christmas Day.
-Houdini-

Above: Houdini was a genius at self-promotion, as this Christmas card that he designed clearly shows. The doggerel verse also reveals his obsession with 'spirit debunking'


HOUDINI
Exposes the tricks used by the
Boston Medium "Margery"
to win the $2500 prize offered by the Scientific American.
Also a complete exposure of
ARGAMASILLA
The famous Spaniard who baffled noted Scientists of Europe and America, with his claim to
X-RAY VISION

Left: the cover of a booklet in which Houdini claims to show how he 'exposed' the Boston medium 'Margery' – whose real name was Mina Crandon – when she attempted to win the $2500 prize offered by the *Scientific American* for 'the first physical manifestation of a psychic nature produced under scientific control'. Several members of the investigating committee were initially impressed by Margery, but Houdini's tests raised doubts. He sat her in the specially constructed cabinet (in which he is posing) – only to be accused by her spirit guide, her brother Walter, of rigging the cabinet so the medium could be accused of fraud. In later years Houdini's former assistant is said to have confessed to doing so on Houdini's orders, because ''e wanted to fix her good'

Pieces of the Chinese puzzle

The Chinese seem more receptive than Westerners to the paranormal. As PAUL SIEVEKING explains, top scientists take part in 'wild man' hunts, and ordinary people take fright at the disaster prophecies of astrologers

SIX PARTY WORKERS from the Shennongjia forestry region in Hubei Province, central China, were driving along a road near Chunshuya village at 1 a.m. on 14 May 1976. Suddenly they came upon a strange tail-less creature, with reddish fur, lying in the road. The driver kept his headlights directed onto the creature while the others went forward to investigate. They approached to within 6 feet (2 metres) of it, and one of them tossed a stone at the animal's hindquarters. It rose on its hind legs and lumbered off into the darkness. It was neither a bear nor any other animal they had ever seen before. A telegram reporting the incident was sent to the Institute of Palaeoanthropology and Vertebrate Palaeontology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. There were other reports of a similar beast from the region during 1976.

The mountainous area covered by Shennongjia and its neighbouring regions Qinling and Bashan has a temperate climate. It is thinly populated and is the home of many rare plants and animals, such as the giant panda. There are undoubtedly new animal species to be discovered, perhaps including some large ones: zoologists have discovered a new variety of bear, the Shennongjia white bear, in this area. The vast forests are supposed to be the home of the *yeren* or wild man (also called a *xuěrén*), described in folk tales and writings of the last 2000 years.

Other provinces of China also produce stories of wild men. Wang Zelin, once a student of biology, claimed to have seen a creature of an unknown type while he was travelling in south-western Shaanxi in 1940. 'It looked like those plaster reconstructions of the Peking Man,' he said, 'only much more hairy, and it had an ugly protruding snout.' Peasants living in the locality tell of encounters with the yeren, which 'walk like humans, but have faces like monkeys'.

In 1962 reports of the yeren came from

Two members of a Chinese Academy of Sciences expedition scale a peak in the Shennongjia region in their hunt for a *yeren*, or wild man. The effort that the scientific establishment has put into finding the yeren has been massive, and has yielded apparent traces of the beast – hairs, excreta and so on. The yeren itself may have been sighted by the hunters on one occasion

Left: living proof that large creatures can exist undiscovered in the remote regions of China: the Shennongjia white bear, which was a relatively late discovery by zoologists. The bear may account for some yeren reports – but certainly not all

Below: Dr Zhou Guoxing, an anthropologist, pictured during the large yeren hunt mounted in March 1977. No yeren was captured, but a great deal of evidence of its existence was found

Bottom: some members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences expedition climb a hillside in Shennongjia in search of the yeren. The area, forested and mountainous, has yielded reports of the wild man for 2000 years

Xishuangbanna in a remote part of Yunnan Province. It prompted memories of previous sightings: one peasant told of having been with Nationalist Chinese soldiers who tracked eight of the creatures through thick forests for 10 days in 1947. One creature was killed and dismembered by the soldiers, who ate its flesh.

On 23 May 1957 a 13-year-old girl called Wang Longmei (though another report has it that she was called Xu Fudi) was grazing a few cows near a creek in Zhuatang village, in the coastal province of Zhejiang. It was drizzling, and the afternoon was dark, when a creature resembling a human being appeared and came towards her. She cried for help, and the beast panicked and stumbled into a bog. There it was beaten to death with sticks by the women of the village. The peasants decided they had found the legendary 'man-bear'. They lopped off its hands and feet and sent them to the local government authorities, hoping for a reward. The remains were preserved by a biology teacher. In 1980 they came to light again, and for a while the press ran reports linking this creature with the Shennongjia sightings. However, it emerged in April 1982 that the Zhuatang creature had had a long tail, was about 5 feet (1.5 metres) tall, and was covered with long black silky hair. An examination of the hands and feet confirmed that they belonged to some kind of climbing monkey – not a yeren.

Hunt for the wild man

The Academy of Sciences has long taken a serious interests in reports of wild men. In 1959 it participated in the Tibetan Mount Everest expedition to study the 'abominable snowman', or yeti. The effort was interrupted, however, by fighting between the Tibetans and their Chinese rulers. In 1976, following the reports of yeren in the Shennongjia region mentioned above, the academy organised another search, under Yuan Zhenxin and Huang Wangpo. In March 1977 a 110-member expedition set out, composed of biologists, zoologists, photographers and teams of soldiers. It was equipped with rifles, tranquilliser guns, tape recorders, cameras and dogs. The search lasted eight months, but no creature was captured. Zhou Guoxing, an anthropologist with the Peking Museum of Natural History, said that at one point the search party came close to one of the creatures, but before it could be captured a nervous soldier accidentally shot himself in the leg. The shot brought expedition members rushing in from all directions and presumably frightened the creature away. However, a wealth of indirect evidence, in the form of footprints, hair and excreta, was discovered and studied. The

Above: Gong Yulan, the woman standing by the tree, recounts the story of the yeren she believes she saw on 19 June 1976. The beast was scratching its back against the tree; fine hairs were later found adhering to the trunk. They did not belong to any identifiable species of animal

team also interviewed hundreds of people – teachers, hunters, herb collectors and others – who gave vivid accounts of encounters with the yeren.

A summary report of the expedition's findings appeared in the July 1979 issue of *China Reconstructs*:

> On June 19th, 1976, Gong Yulan, a 32-year-old member of the Qunli brigade of the Qiaoshang commune in Fangxian county and her four-year-old child were in the mountains cutting grass when they saw some such creature scratching its back against a tree trunk.
>
> When our team questioned people in the area, the wife of the brigade leader recalled how Gong Yulan had come running to her door, all out of breath with great beads of sweat on her forehead, saying: 'A yeren! A yeren!'
>
> Gong Yulan led us to the spot where she had seen the creature. On the tree trunk, 1.3 metres [4 feet 3 inches] from the ground, we found several dozen fine hairs of varying length. In August of the same year another group of investigators discovered two long hairs 1.8 metres [5 feet 11 inches] from the ground on the same tree trunk.

The hair was found to belong to a higher primate of some kind and definitely not to a brown or black bear. Four types of monkey live in the Shennongjia forests: the golden langur, the white-headed langur, the red-faced macaque and the great green monkey. But these are much smaller than the creature described by Gong Yulan and quite different in appearance.

After thousands of footprints, some up to 18 inches (45 centimetres) in length, had been studied, the investigators concluded that a fully grown yeren is anything up to 8 feet (2.4 metres) tall, weighs about 550 pounds (250 kilograms) and has a stride of more than 6 feet (1.8 metres). The footprints are like those of a human being, except that the oval big toe turns outwards.

Others used more subtle methods than the academy's to locate thé yeren. It was reported that an enterprising scientist was walking through the wilds of Hubei Province, dressed in an ape suit and carrying a bundle of dates, with which he hoped to make a good first impression on the yeren when they met.

The academy scientists speculate that the yeren might be a descendant of *Gigantopithecus*, the hominid ape whose fossilised bones, 200,000 years old, have been discovered in Hubei. The scientists are clearly searching for a fairly conventional solution, and would have no time for hypotheses about apparitions or other paranormal phenomena.

Dragged into the depths

Like most regions of the world, China has its stories of lake monsters. In June 1980 there were reports of a monster in Menbu Lake, 310 square miles (800 square kilometres) in area, on the Tibetan Plateau. It had been seen by both farmers and party officials. Three witnesses reported seeing a strange animal with a body as big as a house, a very long neck, and a comparatively big head. One story tells of a farmer who was rowing on the lake when he was dragged down into it by the monster and disappeared for ever. Another story said that a cow left tied up near the lake disappeared, leaving traces of having been dragged into the water.

Three months later there was news of monsters in Lake Tian Chi ('the lake in heaven') at the other end of China, in Jilin

Right: a plaster cast of what appears to be a footprint, found in Shennongjia in August 1977. Utterly unlike the prints left by any known creature, it prompts the speculation that it was made by a yeren

Province. The lake is in the crater of the volcano Baitoushan, which last exploded in 1702 – which makes nonsense of theories that the lake monsters are surviving dinosaurs!

The monster was described as having a flat beak like a duck, a head shaped like a cow's, and a body bigger than a cow's. Piao Longzhi, a meteorological worker on the mountain, fired shots at the beast in August 1980. Some of them seemed to graze its head. It was stated that a group of five monsters had been reported on one occasion.

Magical practices and all the occult arts have a long history in China, and belief in them still flourishes today. In January 1981 the news came out of Tibet that a work entitled *The book of heavenly prophecy* was circulating there. It had apparently first appeared 20 years previously, but was now gaining such attention that Lhasa Radio felt constrained to denounce it. The book encouraged people to eat as much as they could and buy as much clothing as possible, because doomsday was at hand: famine, drought and flood were said to be coming, and the Earth would then be destroyed.

The government-controlled radio denounced all this as nonsense. But in March China was appealing for international aid (to the tune of $700 million) because of famine; Hebei Province was suffering from drought (23 million people affected); and Hubei Province was suffering from flooding (with 20 million affected).

Then, at the end of March, about 4000 people sailed in 100 junks to Hong Kong, begging to be allowed to stay until 10 April. Astrologers and Taoist priests had predicted that an earthquake would hit the southern province of Guangdong during that period. British and Chinese experts agreed that their fears were groundless, landing permission was refused, and the junks were escorted back to sea. On 9 April, an earth tremor shook Guangdong for 10 seconds. Although it was only rated at 3 to 4 points on the Mercalli scale of felt intensity ('vibration like passing of heavy trucks . . . windows, dishes, doors rattle') it doubtless raised the prestige of those astrologers and priests.

Even the rocks seemed to be yelling for help around that time. According to the *Shansi Daily* in February 1981, cries for help were said to have been heard emanating from a rock that juts out of the Dongting Lake in Hunan Province. It was speculated that the rock in some way recorded the cries of drowning sailors and 'played them back' when the conditions of temperature and light were just right.

In October 1981 the *Canton Daily* reported a wonder of Yunnan Province. A 'dancing tree' had been discovered: 'When music is played near the tree, the trunk sways in time to the rhythm and its leaves turn from side to side. As soon as the music stops, the tree also immediately ceases to move.' This worked only with soft melodious music: the tree ignored loud martial music: 'When people standing near the tree talk softly, the tree will also begin to dance, but if the talking is loud and raucous, it does not move.'

On page 2574: the psychic Chinese children who seem to be 'all eyes'

Above: scores of fishing boats from Red China arrived in Hong Kong on 3 December 1980, fleeing from an earthquake that astrologers and priests had predicted. The boats were compelled by the authorities to return to their home ports – where an earth tremor struck on 9 April

Below: Lake Tian Chi, in Jilin Province, northern China. The lake is young, for it occupies the crater of a volcano that last exploded in 1702 – yet it is reported that monsters live in it

Many ufologists believe that detecting a UFO on radar is the next best thing to capturing it and taking it into a laboratory. But, as JENNY RANDLES explains, radar evidence, though valuable, is often ambiguous and can raise as many questions as it answers

Scanning the skies

IN THE SUMMER OF 1952 an air force radar operator on the Isle of Wight, off the coast of southern England, saw a most peculiar trace on his radar screen. Then another one appeared – and then there were nine unidentifiable blips visible, moving across the screen at a rate corresponding to an incredible airspeed. He checked his equipment: there seemed to be no malfunction. Then the targets travelled out of the radar's range at an estimated 7000 miles per hour (11,000 km/h). This was, of course, far in advance of the capabilities of any craft other than experimental rockets at that time.

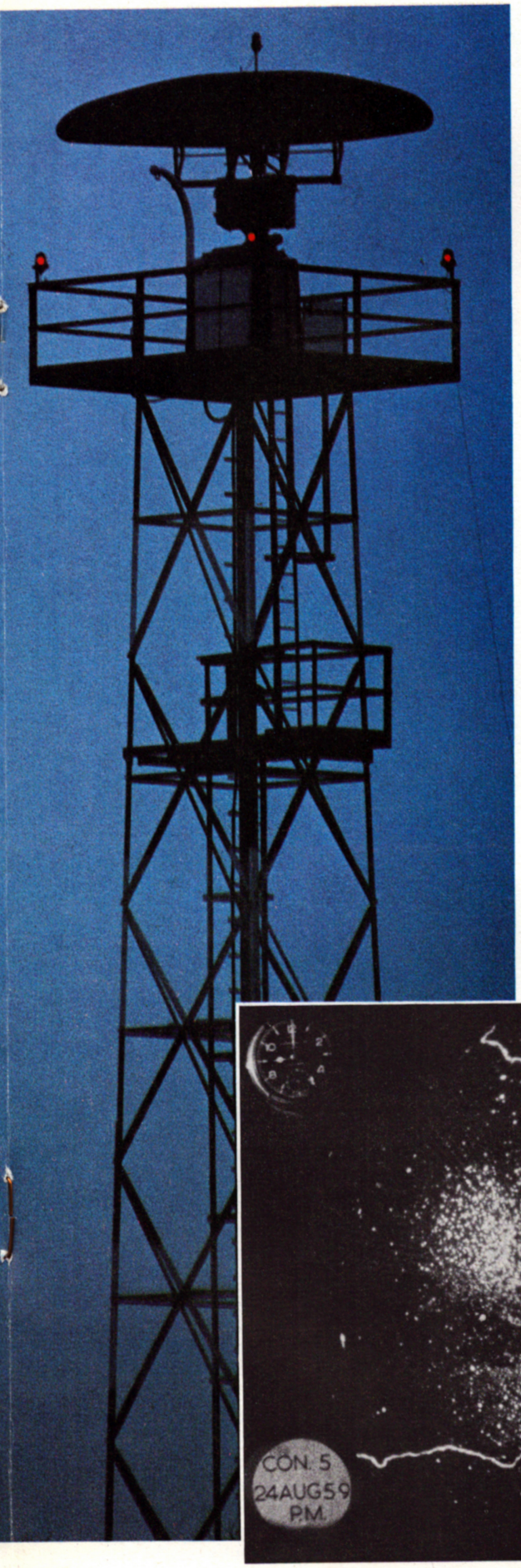
The operator completed a report on this incident. Shortly afterwards, he says, all the staff were called together and politely but firmly 'advised' that, as far as they were concerned, the incident had never happened. And they were more explicitly reminded of the terms of the Official Secrets Act by which they were all bound, and the consequences of infringing this.

The Act is effective only for 30 years in regard to incidents of this kind. So it was in 1982 that the witness, now retired, reported the event to the author. He also asked whether any visual sighting had been made at the time that would corroborate it. The answer was that nothing is known of such an incident.

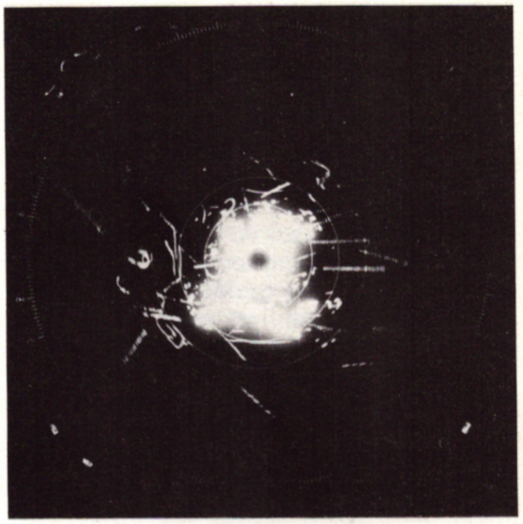
There are a number of similar accounts on file with UFO organisations, in Britain and elsewhere. They suggest that the files of the world's armed services are packed with such cases, some possibly strengthened by simultaneous visual sightings. The British Ministry of Defence certainly does not seem in public to attach much importance to such anomalous radar sightings. In fact, in 1982 it stated that it did not retain such reports dating from before 1962. On the face of it such an admission is astonishing. It would mean that the RAF had no record of, say, the highly significant Lakenheath/Bentwaters case of August 1956 (see page 198) – a case that has never been explained, and is widely regarded as one of the best examples in UFO history of a phenomenon of an unknown kind. The alternative – that dozens of intriguing radar cases are lying in a secret file whose very existence is denied – is even more disturbing, and not only to ufologists.

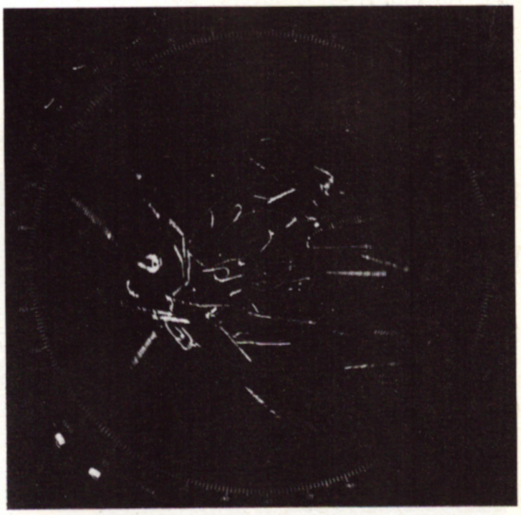
A radar sighting of an unidentified object is often viewed with great respect by ufologists. It is regarded as virtual confirmation that the object is solid – perhaps even an extra-terrestrial machine with fantastic capabilities. But in fact the question of the interpretation of radar evidence is extremely complex. To understand it the basic principles of radar itself and the way it is used for different purposes must be understood.

The word 'radar' is an acronym for Radio Detection and Ranging. It was first put into use during the Second World War, and its applications, both military and civilian, rapidly expanded during the postwar years. There was much to be learned in those early days about the behaviour of radar waves, and there were teething troubles with new equipment. There seem to be far more instances of radar UFO cases from the 1950s than from either of the following two decades. This inevitably creates the suspicion that many were due to complexities of the behaviour of radar equipment and radar waves that were then not sufficiently understood. However, today's radar systems are far from trouble-free. As one specialist said in 1978, 'The problems and shortcomings of early radar



Radar scanners are instantly recognisable features of every airport. Some are relatively short-range (left); others observe the movements of air traffic over large areas (far left). The parabolically curved dish functions like a lighthouse mirror, reflecting the radar waves forward in a narrow beam that sweeps all points of the compass as the scanner rotates. Between transmitted pulses the scanner 'listens' for radar echoes from objects in the path of the beam. Radar is vital for tracking the movements of aircraft: what can it tell us about UFOs?





Right: the display on an air traffic control radar screen – with 'clutter' (top) and without (bottom). The clutter consists of reflections from stationary objects on the ground: a computer removes these from the display when the operator so wishes. A blip corresponding to a stationary UFO would inevitably be removed at the same time.

Below: 'targets' crowd a radar display of south-eastern England. They are neither aircraft nor UFOs but flocks of migrant birds

systems are still with us.' Today large radar systems are being increasingly computerised, and such innovations in electronic wizardry might occasionally malfunction.

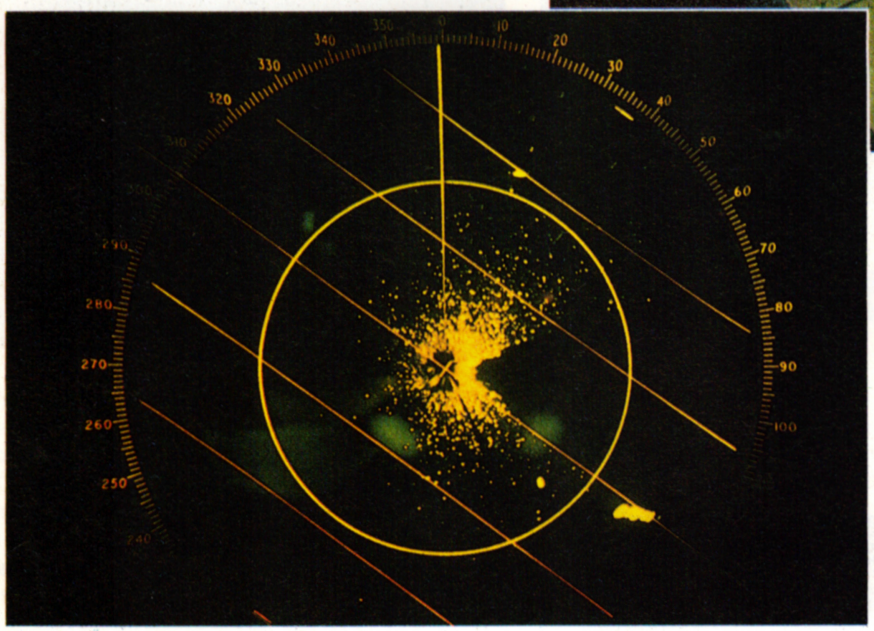
All radar applications rely upon the same principle. An aerial – usually a rotating one – sends out a narrow beam of radio energy in short pulses. The beam spreads out very slightly, but after it has travelled, say, a few hundred miles it becomes several miles wide. An object in the beam's path will reflect some of the beam's energy in all directions. If the object is sufficiently dense, enough of the radar signal will be reflected to be detectable back at the aerial, which 'listens' for it in the gaps between the emitted pulses. The position of the object can now be worked out precisely. Its direction is, of course, simply the direction in which the aerial is pointing. Its distance can be calculated from the delay between the emission of a pulse and the arrival of the echo at the aerial. The positions of all the objects detected by the beam as it rotates can be displayed on a circular screen, much like a television screen, called a plan position indicator. Primary radar, in which little computer processing is involved, shows blips whose brightness corresponds to the strength of the echo. This is often related to

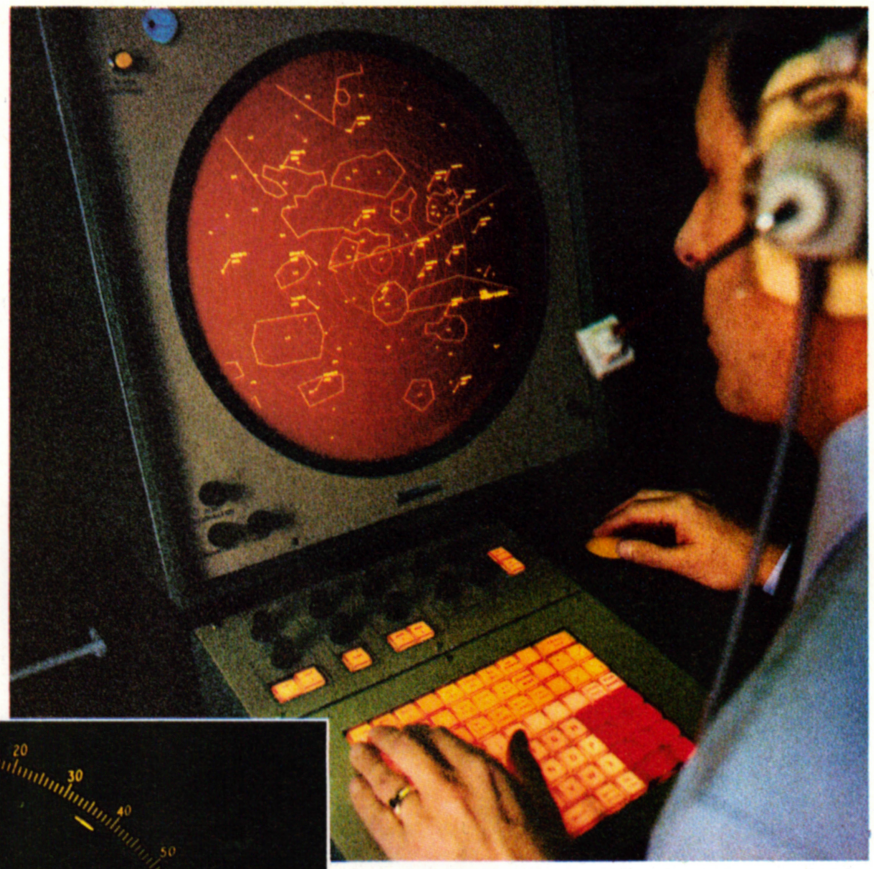
the actual size of the object, but other factors are involved as well – including the shape of the object and the material of which it is made.

In addition, it must be realised that two objects that are relatively close together may not show up as two separate blips on the screen. Suppose that the radar beam spreads at an angle of 3°. At a distance of 25 miles (40 kilometres) from the aerial the beam will be around 1.3 miles (2.1 kilometres) wide. It will also be many miles deep. The beam will not be able to distinguish between objects unless they are widely spaced: they will appear as one blip on the screen.

It should be apparent that the interpretation of images on a radar screen is a skilled job, that requires good eyesight, cool and clear thinking, and considerable experience.

These problems are greatly compounded by the variety of the 'targets' that can appear on a screen. 'Ground clutter' is very common: mountains, oil refineries, tower blocks and so on can reflect the radar beam. Insect swarms and flocks of birds can produce blips as well. Even pockets of what is known as 'non-standard air', differing in temperature, pressure or humidity from the surrounding atmosphere, can cause an image to appear on the screen.





The radar blips on 'primary' radar (above) are formed by direct reflection of radar waves from objects. In the computer-processed image (top) labels specifying the identity and height of some of the aircraft are shown alongside the corresponding blips. This information is derived by 'secondary' radar: a coded pulse is transmitted by the aircraft's onboard 'transponder', in response to the radar pulses sent from the ground. Outlines of certain important areas are also displayed on the radar screen

Stationary clutter is a problem, since it unnecessarily complicates a display. Consequently, radar systems that handle air traffic often have a special computer 'filtering' system called a moving target indicator, or MTI. When it is switched on it removes stationary blips from the display.

Each of the many different varieties of radar system that may be employed for particular purposes has its own problems. There is an extensive network of weather radar stations throughout the world. However, this operates on short wavelengths, which means it is unsuited to detecting aircraft – and perhaps some types of UFO. Generally speaking it is used to track the progress of clouds, rain and snow, and so on. It is particularly liable to spurious echoes from surface features: coastal weather radar is especially prone to clutter, owing to reflections from the surface of the sea.

Squawk, please

Radar systems, both civil and military, vary widely in function but they are all strictly concerned with a localised area, and the task of their operators is to track the aircraft for which they are responsible and guide them safely to their landing or to their next traffic control zone. Nowadays all large aircraft and numerous small ones carry a transponder – a transmitter that can respond automatically to a radar pulse and send back a coded message, carrying information about the aircraft's identity, its altitude and its destination. The radar operator can ask the pilot to 'squawk' by means of the transponder; he will then see the information 'written' on the screen alongside the aircraft's blip. This will pick it out from all the other targets on the screen, which include not only aircraft coming to and going from the airfield that the radar serves but also aircraft in transit, light aircraft flitting about on unscheduled flights, crop-spraying aircraft, and so on. The MTI will cut out anything that is stationary – or even that is moving at speeds that are much slower than an aircraft's. Without using the MTI, the controller would be faced with such a confusing morass of targets he would never

be able to do his job successfully.

It is highly unlikely that a UFO would be noticed in these circumstances, let alone investigated. There may be many unidentified, non-transponding targets on the screen, but an operator simply does not have the time to worry about what they *might* be, unless they pose a direct threat to one of his aircraft.

Air traffic moving between airports is controlled by a very similar system. In Britain there are just three main centres: London and Manchester, and Prestwick in Scotland. Life in these radar rooms is even more busy than at an airport control tower. They have to control hundreds of flights every day and must constantly be alert for potential collisions.

Such long-range radar systems do pick up unidentified blips. Some of them might prove, on further investigation, to be extraordinary objects. Unfortunately there are just too many of them. The only occasions on which the operator will take an interest in them is when they threaten to come too close to one of the aircraft under his supervision. Such a 'conflict alert' opened the film *Close encounters of the third kind* (1977).

Below: air traffic controllers at a large international airport. Contrary to what might be thought, they are not in a good position to study UFOs: although unidentified 'targets' may appear on their screens, the operators must confine their attention strictly to the aircraft for whose safety they are responsible

Bottom: huge radomes protect the early warning radar scanners at Fylingdales, on the Yorkshire moors. This station is concerned with detecting missiles launched from the Soviet Union. If anomalous echoes are ever received, the fact is a well-guarded secret

Of course, there are other radar systems. A physicist involved in radar study of the upper atmosphere once got into conversation with the author on a train journey. Before disappearing into the crowds, he said: 'We often record unknown objects that appear to be controlled aircraft. We call them UFOs!'

Another type of radar system is the long-distance radar intended to provide early warning of enemy missiles. There are installations in Alaska and at Fylingdales, in northern England. But apart from the fact that, for obvious reasons, they are secret, they are not too valuable to UFO research. They concentrate only on remote objects moving in the highly specific manner of ballistic missiles. An object performing fantastic manoeuvres over a nearby town would elicit no reaction whatsoever from such a radar station.

The American UFO researcher Allan Hendry studied radar establishments in the United States and concluded that radar is much less useful as a tool of UFO detection than might at first be supposed.

But there are occasions when a sighting of a UFO does receive support from radar. In one year at the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Illinois, there were five such reports, out of 1300 UFO reports altogether. A typical case occurred at Fairborn, Ohio, where an orange light was seen in the sky. A local radar installation was called, but they had noticed nothing at that spot. However, now alerted, they did pick up one very brief, weak signal. Subsequent investigation showed that the object was a hot air balloon released by a trickster, whom the police apprehended. The radar return had been weak and ephemeral because the balloon was so insubstantial – it would not have appeared on radar at all if it had not happened to have a little metal in its construction. It was a good case of a radar-visual sighting – but it nonetheless ended up in the 'identified' file.

In fact all five of Hendry's radar-visual cases were shown to involve natural objects. Three of them were sightings of balloons, two of stars sparkling and flashing different colours. Yet in these last two cases as well, local radar operators apparently found radar targets in the direction of the 'UFO'. But it is almost impossible for such a radar system to get an echo from a heavenly body. The relationship between what was seen on radar and what was seen by the naked eye proved to be spurious.

On page 2546: what the radar evidence showed in some striking UFO cases

'Ghoules of tomorrow'

People who experience a vision of the past or future generally do so only as passive observers. But in some bizarre cases, chronicled here by JOAN FORMAN, the time traveller is himself seen by, and interacts with, the inhabitants of another era

MOST TIMESLIPS ARE a one-way process. The subject finds himself observing people or events from the past or future while he himself remains invisible to or apart from them. But there are also cases when the experience seems to be two-way. The present-time observer and the people in the past or future time interact; each is aware of the other.

Two-way timeslips usually involve a conjunction of present and past time (rather than present and future). An experience of this kind was told to the author by a retired senior police officer; it concerned Littlecote Manor in Wiltshire, which is alleged to have several ghosts.

In the course of his duties the police officer had been called to Littlecote to investigate a burglary, and the curator had told him of an encounter that seemed to be more than a mere haunting.

Mr S., the curator, was walking through the long gallery of the manor one day when he noticed a Roundhead soldier seated on a chair near one of the windows. As Littlecote had been held by Cromwell's New Model Army during the Civil War, Mr S. was not particularly surprised or alarmed to see the apparition. What did astonish him was the fact that the soldier turned his head and watched Mr S. as he approached him. Each recognised the other's presence, before the soldier faded from sight.

In this incident there was no indication that the soldier was aware that he was observing someone in a different time zone from his own; but this additional factor does occur in some two-way timeslips.

In the early 1960s Mr C.B., a former member of staff of the British Museum, visited a large village north-east of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland. With him were two American friends, Dr and Mrs Charles Muses, the former a noted researcher and writer on parapsychology. The village was built on the site of a Roman town, and at the centre were the remains of a Roman amphitheatre, theatre and race-track, separated by a crossroads.

The visitors went first to the amphitheatre, and then crossed the road to the theatre. Much of the proscenium (stage) remained, and some of the tiers of seating rising up the sides of the theatre with high walls behind. The three visitors first inspected the stage and then descended into the orchestra (the semi-circular space in front of the stage where the chorus danced and sang). They then separated: Mr B. returned to the stage while his friends climbed up to some of the most distant seating. With the idea of testing the acoustics, Mr B. began to speak in what he describes as 'a normal lecturing voice'; from where they sat at the back of the auditorium his friends could hear him perfectly. At the end of his demonstration Mr B. stepped down into the orchestra again and straight into a most extraordinary time dislocation.

The sides of the ruined theatre suddenly became complete, as did the stage. People were pouring in to the theatre and filling the seats, and although Mr B. did not notice the fact during the experience, he remarked later that his range of vision 'was rather narrower than in real life'.

In an upper row of seats (which on later examination of the auditorium he found was missing) he saw a small group of people with an attractive girl, dressed in a yellow garment, in the middle. At the instant Mr B. noticed her, she also saw him; their eyes met

A two-way timeslip took place in the long gallery (below) of Littlecote Manor (bottom) in Wiltshire. The curator encountered a Roundhead soldier in the uniform of Cromwell's New Model Army (shown in the drawing, right); the seated soldier turned his head as the curator approached, and watched him. Each was aware of the other's presence – then the soldier faded from sight

and she appeared to be shocked and upset by what she saw. She plucked at her friends' clothing in her agitation to attract their attention, and pointed straight at Mr B. for several seconds. But her friends were apparently unable to see the figure at which she gazed.

Then a young man walked onto the stage carrying a cithara (an ancient lute), which he proceeded to play. Mr B. heard the first plucked notes of the strings coming to him very faintly, and as they died away into silence, so the vision faded and the strange encounter was over. 'I suppose,' he wrote in a letter to the author,

> I'm one of the people who went to the theatre in Switzerland some 1700 years ago. That's just as I remember the incident. A real two-way recognition of two persons in two times. How strange I must have looked to a Roman girl!

Mr B. has had other experiences of a psychic nature, one of which was strikingly similar to his experience at Neuchâtel.

This incident occurred in the ruins of Roman Verulamium (modern St Albans) in Hertfordshire in the early 1950s. Mr B. visited the ruins in the company of two student teachers. At one point during their visit the three of them were leaning on a wooden fence close by the broken walls that had once held the London Gate of the Roman town. Suddenly in Mr B.'s eyes the gate became whole, and the road approaching it appeared to lead into a long tunnel. Coming out of it he saw a small white chariot drawn by two cream Welsh ponies, their fast trot being accelerated by the whip of the driver, who was a young man wearing a belted tunic made of some unusual, fine-woven material.

As the chariot drew level with Mr B. the ponies caught sight of him. They dug their hooves into the ground, straightening their forelegs as they did so. The chariot came to a halt. The young charioteer lashed the animals furiously; he himself did not appear to see Mr B.

According to Mr B. the scene (which he distinctly remembered as being in colour) lasted for only a few seconds. Then it faded and he was once more leaning on the wooden fence by the ruined London Gate of Verulamium. Throughout the incident he heard no sound, although he saw that the charioteer appeared to be shouting at his animals. In both the timeslips in which Mr B. was involved, his companions saw nothing unusual, but they noticed that during the incidents he looked 'strange'.

Strange is scarcely an adequate description for what happened to the psychic Matthew Manning. As an adolescent, he had been involved in a prolonged period of poltergeist activity, which had been brought

Right: a ruined Roman theatre similar to this one at Arles, in France, was the scene of a remarkable time dislocation. A 20th-century tourist, Mr B., suddenly stepped back into the Roman era: the ruined stage and sides of the theatre became whole, and he saw the seats filling up with a Roman audience

When Mr B. stepped back in time into a 'live' Roman theatre he saw a girl dressed in a yellow garment (similar to the one shown in the drawing above). She also saw him, and tried to draw her companions' attention to him, but they were apparently unable to see him. A musician then came out onto the stage and began to play a cithara (a kind of lute, shown right in a Roman wall painting). Mr B. actually heard the first notes of the cithara before the scene faded

under control only when his aptitude for automatic writing and drawing was discovered (see page 390).

Manning's parents bought an old house near Cambridge, dating partly from the 17th and partly from the 18th century. In 1971 Manning encountered what seemed to be a ghost in this house. He first met the apparition on the stairs; it seemed quite solid, and as real as Manning himself. This apparition claimed to be Robert Webbe, who had once owned the house, and had been responsible for building half of it. He apologised for alarming Manning, and explained that as his legs were troubling him, he had to take exercise. He was using two sticks to support himself.

This was only the first of many encounters. Webbe 'lived' with the Mannings, lighting candles, materialising objects (apports) such as book pages, small gifts and a loaf of bread, and occasionally removing goods that belonged to the family and hiding them in what he referred to as his 'safe'. This was a hole under some bedroom floorboards, which he showed to Manning, and in which most of the missing objects were found.

Manning used automatic writing to carry on conversations with the 18th-century man. The situation was brought to a crisis when Manning asked Webbe whether there was a ghost in his house. Webbe replied indignantly that there was not. If there were, he said, he would chase it away. When Manning insisted that his family had seen the ghost, Webbe retorted that he did not believe it, and that Manning was merely trying to frighten him.

When Manning asked Webbe to whom he thought he was speaking, Webbe replied, 'I think sometimes I am going mad. I hear a voyce in myne head which I hear talking to me. . . . But tell no one else they locke me away.'

Manning then told Webbe the true nature

of the situation: that it was the older man who was existing out of his time, and the younger who was in the flesh. The apparition appeared to be distressed and unable to believe this news. He insisted that Manning must be a 'ghoule of tomorrow'.

This curious encounter had the nature of both a haunting and a timeslip. Because the two participants were able to communicate with each other, and because each insisted that his own time was the 'real' one, it seems that a genuine interrelationship of time zones existed.

A similar instance occurred at the Chequers Inn, in Smarden, Kent. A young French prisoner (from the time of the Napoleonic wars) still carries on an active 'life' in the building, hiding objects and producing apports, and on one occasion actually touching a guest, leaving the mark of a cross on her body. An apparition of a small, dark man has been seen in one of the bedrooms, but there has been no direct communication between him and the 20th-century inhabitants.

Both these cases involve a past time zone intruding on the present time zone, but in a more prolonged and interrelated way than in the experiences of Mr B., or indeed of the British family on holiday in Germany (see page 2047) who saw and were seen by the occupants of a silver cigar-shaped vehicle with porthole-like windows, seemingly a vehicle from the future. In the two latter cases it was the 20th-century participants who 'slipped' into another time; in the former cases the residents of the 20th century were visited in their own time by persons from other time zones.

How or why such things occur is a mystery. A 20th-century resident who slips into the future is presumably seen by the residents of that future time as a ghost from the past. If he slips into the past, he will appear as a vision of the future.

Coexisting times

Both phenomena seem to indicate the coexistence of different time zones, and undoubtedly the most interesting cases are those in which the time zones appear to intertwine, and individuals from each zone converse with each other, or interact in some other way.

As to the mechanism involved in timeslips, various theories have been put forward (see page 758), including the idea that information about past or future events is 'broadcast' on as yet undiscovered electromagnetic waves, which the human brain may, on occasion, intercept. Other elements involved are the trigger factor that appears to set off the event, and, in some cases, the absence of sound from beginning to end of the timeslip.

If we were ever able to understand how timeslips happen, we might be nearer to an understanding of the mysterious nature of the Universe itself.

Top: the collection of objects (apports) that the ghost of Robert Webbe scattered about Matthew Manning's house included a string of plastic beads, a brass snuff box in the shape of a fish, and a silver thimble. Manning believed Webbe might have taken them from previous occupants of the house

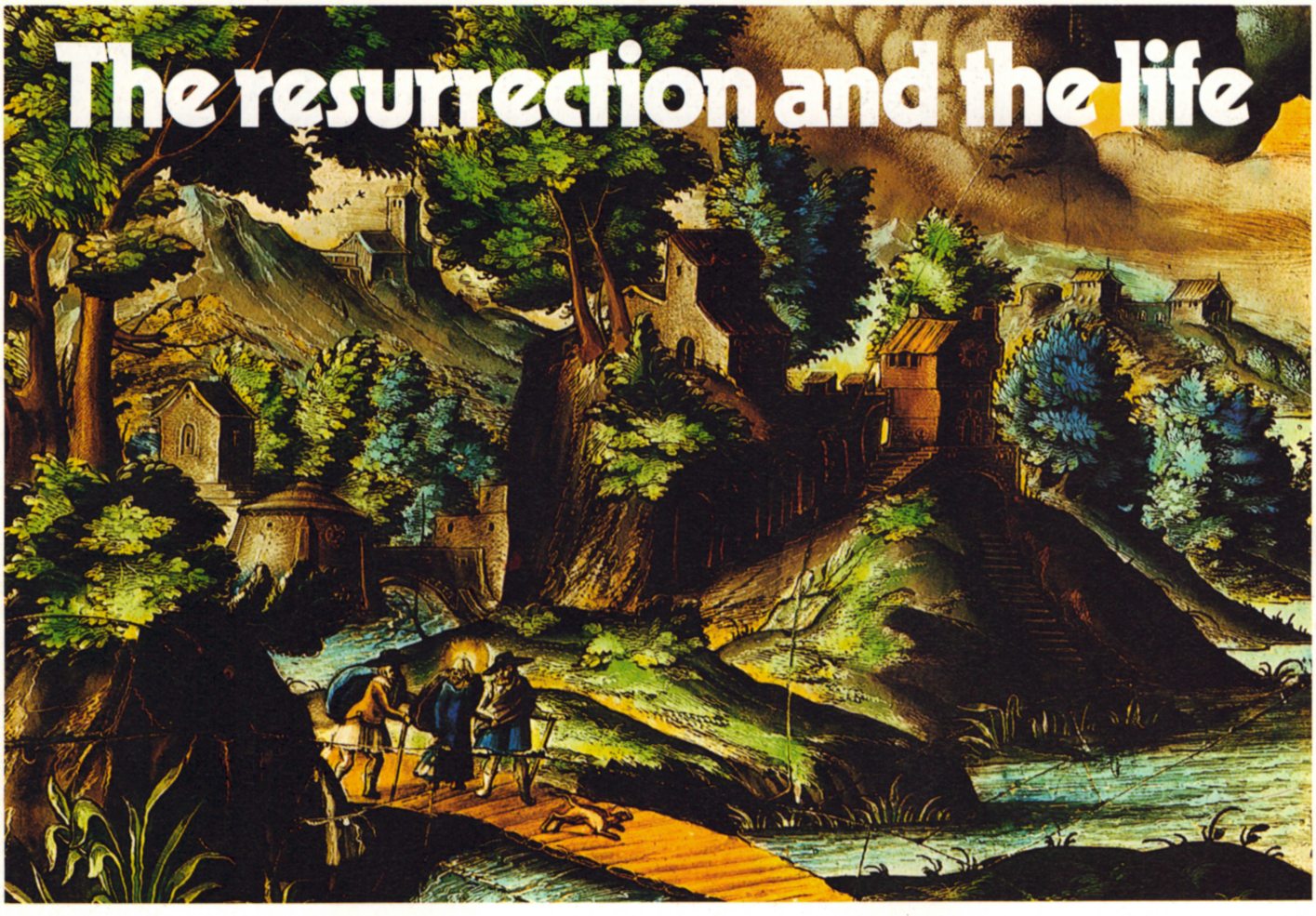
Above: a model of the London Gate of the Roman city of Verulamium. Mr B. saw a charioteer driving out of the gate when he visited its site at present-day St Albans (left)

Left: the room in the Chequers Inn in Smarden, Kent, where a small, dark man has often been seen, the ghost apparently of a French prisoner from the Napoleonic wars; he 'lives' in the inn, hiding objects, producing apports, and on one occasion touching a guest

Further reading

Joan Forman, *The haunted south*, Robert Hale 1978
Celia Green and Charles McCreery, *Apparitions*, Hamish Hamilton 1975
Matthew Manning, *The strangers*, W. H. Allen 1978
Michael Shallis, *On time*, Burnett Books 1982

The resurrection and the life



A 17th-century Swiss illustration of the appearance of Christ to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. If Christ did not die upon the cross, then the stories of his appearance after his alleged death need not be tales of miracles – and the legend that he lived out the rest of his natural life in Kashmir could be true

Close examination of the biblical descriptions of the crucifixion shows that it is possible that Christ was not dead when taken down from the cross. PETER JAMES assesses the legend that Christ went on to live in India

THE VIEW THAT CHRIST did not undergo a genuine 'resurrection', not having really died in the first place, is amply supported – even if it is not conclusively proved – by the biblical accounts of the crucifixion. John 19:34 describes how, after Christ had been pronounced dead by the Roman guard, his side was pierced by a lance 'and forthwith there came out blood and water'. Yet, as any doctor will testify, dead bodies rarely bleed. The fact that Jesus's body *did* bleed may indicate that his heart was still beating faintly.

Another suggestive piece of evidence concerns the length of time for which Jesus hung upon the cross. Crucifixion, which was generally reserved for rebellion or other extremely serious crimes, was not intended to be a quick method of execution. Pegged up on a cross, it would be days rather than hours before the victim died – of exhaustion, starvation, loss of blood or the ravages of wild animals – as witnesses to 20th-century crucifixions in the Sudan have testified. According to the New Testament, Christ hung on the cross for a matter of a mere three hours (or six, as one variant reading might have it) before he was cut down, as St John explains (John 19:31), because Jewish sensibilities would have been offended by the death agonies of crucifixion victims extending into the Sabbath, and left for dead. Pontius Pilate himself is described as being surprised at Christ's rapid death – 'Pilate marvelled if he were already dead' (Mark 15:44). All things considered, it seems not impossible that Christ was still alive when he was taken down from the cross.

One further piece of biblical evidence deserves attention. In the original Greek version of St Mark's gospel, when Joseph of Arimathea asks for Jesus's body, he uses the word *soma* – a term that was used to describe living bodies only. Pilate, replying, speaks of the *ptoma*, or corpse of Christ, thinking – or, as some writers have suggested, merely pretending to think – that Christ is dead.

Thus the New Testament, despite its insistence on the 'death' of Christ, provides some very concrete clues to suggest that the 'resurrection' was really the reawakening of a man only *apparently* dead. The reports of his appearances after the crucifixion accordingly take on far greater credibility. There are, to support this interpretation, a few accounts of men surviving crucifixion. For example, the first-century Jewish politician and writer Josephus tells how he came across three of his old acquaintances in a field of crucified

rebels. In favour with the Roman Emperor Titus, Josephus managed to have them taken down – two died, but the third survived.

The possibility that Christ survived the crucifixion should make us pause for thought before rejecting the oriental tales of his wanderings and death in Kashmir (see page 2461). As Robert Graves demonstrated in his work *Jesus in Rome*, Christian, rabbinical and Roman evidence testifies to a widespread belief in Christ's continued physical existence for two or three decades after his crucifixion in AD 33. For instance, the Roman writer Suetonius wrote of the Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54) that 'the Jews, who were raising constant disturbances at the instigation of Christus, he drove from Rome.' Mainly on the strength of this passage, Graves argued that Christ was personally present in Rome during the reign of Claudius. It seems more likely, however, that Christ would have sought refuge away from the centres of Roman jurisdiction and headed for the Jewish colonies further east. His words reported in the New Testament refer several times to his desire to preach to the 'lost sheep of Israel', the Jewish communities that were already at this early date spread throughout the known world.

The Islamic tradition that Christ moved on from Damascus, where he confronted St Paul (Acts 9:3–6), to the Iraqi city of Nisibis, where there was a recently established colony of refugee Jews, seems extremely plausible. Nisibis lay on the main trade route to countries further east and, as Roman sources tell us, it was dotted with Jewish trading colonies as far as the known world extended. The Jewish community in Kashmir certainly seems to be of very ancient date; it probably originated in the days of the Persian Empire.

Above: a re-enactment in the Philippines of Christ's crucifixion. Death by crucifixion was designed to be slow and agonising. Christ, however, hung on the cross for only three hours – and it is quite possible that he was still alive when he was cut down

Below left: Christ appears to Mary Magdalene and (below right) doubting Thomas places his hand in the wound in Christ's side. Was Christ taking leave of his friends before setting off on his journey to Kashmir?

Precious stones and ivory

The idea of Jesus travelling as far as Kashmir in the first century AD may seem rather bizarre, but we should remember that Rome and India were, at that time, partners in a regular and busy trade for such oriental luxuries as ivory, precious stones, spices and tortoise-shell. Several large hoards of Roman gold coins have been found on the west coast of India, dating from between 27 BC and AD 68, and the annals of Augustus record the reception in Rome of two Indian embassies around 25 BC. The Roman demand for Indian luxury goods was so intense that the Roman writer Pliny complained that the trade was depleting the Roman treasury. And India was a land of constant fascination for the philosophers and wise men of the

MORONI'S PROMISE
WHEN YE SHALL RECEIVE
THESE THINGS, I WOULD
EXHORT YOU THAT YE
WOULD ASK GOD, THE
ETERNAL FATHER, IN THE
NAME OF CHRIST, IF THESE
THINGS ARE NOT TRUE; *
IF YE WILL MANIFEST THE
TRUTH OF IT UNTO YOU

A huge statue of the *Book of Mormon* on Mormon Monument Hill, New York state, USA. The 19th-century founder of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, claimed he had translated 'ancient texts' telling of Christ's visit to the Americas after his resurrection. The legends of Christ's life in Kashmir are perhaps more historically plausible – but they, too, have yet to receive convincing proof

Graeco-Roman world. The renowned Greek sage Apollonius of Tyana travelled to India, bringing back the first account of Indian levitations around AD 70. (Interestingly enough, Apollonius was thought to have healed the sick, raised the dead and ascended bodily into heaven as Christ did.)

Truth and tradition

Clearly the Roman and Christian sources provide a surprising amount of circumstantial evidence that agrees with the Eastern traditions of Christ's 'second life'. Jesus may well have survived the crucifixion to live a few more years – and, granted that, the idea that he travelled to the Jewish communities to the east, even as far as India, is not implausible. None of this, however, amounts to the proof for which the Ahmadiyya hope. Despite the persuasive legends, no written or archaeological evidence from the first century AD has yet been produced to demonstrate Christ's presence in India. The traditions, whatever time they originated, were written down centuries after the events they claim to describe.

On the other hand, most historians accept the possibility that Christianity reached India at a very early date, perhaps brought there by St Thomas who, in a medieval biography, the *Acts of Thomas*, is described as having made two missions to India. And perhaps it is not too far-fetched to identify Thomas, the doubting disciple, with Ba'bad, the character of the Kashmiri legend who buried Yuz Asaf (see page 2642); Thomas's surname, Didymus, like Ba'bad, means 'twin'. And the evidence for Thomas's mission to India is much older than the surviving tales of Yuz Asaf. Bishop Hippolytus, towards the close of the second century AD, records how Thomas preached to the Parthians, Persians, Indians and others, and how he was martyred at Chola in India.

Bearing in mind the more substantial traditions about St Thomas, there is an alternative explanation of the Yuz Asaf legends to that put forward by the Ahmadiyya. Cut off from the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy, the remote pockets of Christianity founded by St Thomas and his group were isolated in a hostile world of Hindus, Zoroastrians, Muslims, and other religious groups, and concrete evidence that the founder of their religion had visited the area – a tomb or other relic – would have provided a rallying point for the faithful. Faith, it is said, can move mountains, and it can certainly confuse locales and persons. Such a thing certainly happened with the Glastonbury legends of Britain, which have Joseph of Arimathea – who, according to the Gospels, buried Jesus – arriving in the company of all the Marys and other biblical characters.

To be fair to the Indian legends, they can claim a measure of historical plausibility. A saintly missionary of the Christian tradition, Yuz Asaf, most probably *did* exist – perhaps he was St Thomas himself, or one of his colleagues. But it should be borne in mind that, along with the tomb of Jesus, the tribesmen of the Kashmir and Pakistan hill country venerate their own 'burial places' for his mother Mary as well as the prophet Moses, who lived in the 15th century BC and whose true grave is known to be in what is now Jordan. These Indian 'biblical' traditions probably tell us more about the curious way in which religions transplant themselves, replete with locales and holy relics, than about the last days of Jesus Christ. So, until the Ahmadiyya manage to excavate the tomb in Srinagar and produce the conclusive evidence they believe must lie there, we had best take the legends of Jesus in Kashmir with a large, though sympathetic, pinch of salt.

Further reading

Al-Haj Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, The Woking Muslim Mission and Literary Trust 1956

A. Faber-Kaiser, *Jesus died in Kashmir*, Gordon and Cremonesi 1977

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
I am writing to tell you of an incident that occurred about four years ago, when I was 11 years old.

My grandparents live in a large house that is well over 500 years old. They use one large room as a kitchen and living room, and another for occasions such as Christmas. Now, my grandfather owns a large plot of land on which he cultivates strawberries for sale. It was August, and I was in the room next to the 'Christmas room' making up some cardboard boxes for his trade. I felt I was being watched by someone. The door was open, and I could see into the Christmas room – and there I saw a middle-aged woman in a long red dress standing at the fireplace, her arm resting on the mantelpiece. The fireplace itself was different – the gold carriage clocks and ornaments that my grandmother kept there were gone, and there was an open fire burning merrily in the grate. The woman was looking straight at me, and smiling as if she wanted to tell me something. I was frightened – I could not leave the room without walking past the woman. I looked down at my work – and when I looked up again, the woman had gone. I ran to my bedroom – and I'm not ashamed to say that I cried my eyes out.

A few days before this experience, I had been in hospital for a double hernia operation. My mother suggested that it might have been the operation that made me see the woman. Whatever the reason, I know what I saw, and will never forget it. To this day, I avoid going into the Christmas room as much as possible.

Yours faithfully,
Angela Kimber Mereworth, Kent

Dear Sir,
A friend of mine, an actor, told me of a ghostly encounter he had once had on Leeds station. The background to the story was that a fellow actor, whose surname was Beynon – and whose nickname was 'Goss', after the character Gossamer Beynon in *Under Milk Wood* – had committed suicide. Actually he had swallowed a great many barbiturates and then panicked – but had died in the ambulance.

My friend was thinking of the lines he was trying to learn for his next part, and waiting for a train at Leeds Central Station. He began to walk up and down muttering the lines under his breath (no doubt getting very strange looks from fellow passengers in the process) and gradually he found himself at the very end of the platform, facing endless tracks disappearing into infinity. It was slightly foggy. Suddenly 'Goss' came walking *towards* him through the fog, wearing the rather flamboyant suit he had worn in a certain play they had both been in in a local repertory company. My friend greeted him, but received no reply except a beaming smile. Goss then pointed towards the heart of the station and strode past before my friend could say or do anything else. Quickly recovering himself, however, he ran after his old colleague, calling him by name. Once out of the fog he could see most of the platforms – but no Goss. It was then that he realised he had just seen and spoken to a dead man and that Goss had approached him through the fog from a non-existent platform.

Somewhat shattered my friend stood there, helplessly going over the incident in his mind, when the station announcer said that there was a message for 'Mr Witherenshawe' at the Station Master's office. That is my friend's name. But when he reached the office there was no message and apparently no knowledge of one.

Later that day, he arrived home to find an invitation to Goss's memorial service lying on his hall floor. Had Goss, as it were, been extending a personal invitation?

Whatever the explanation, it seems my friend was not alone in having had such an encounter; at the memorial service he met no less than three other people who admitted to having seen the dead man at about the same time.

Yours faithfully,
Kim Jessop Bingley, Yorkshire

Dear Sir,
On reading your article about Egryn Chapel and the mysterious lights that appeared there in the early years of this century [issue 39], I remembered a strange experience I had on 29 June 1981. At that time we were camping close to Egryn, and we had just been to see some friends. It was about 10.30 p.m., and I was just preparing to go to bed. Suddenly some lights attracted my attention over towards Barmouth. The lights seemed to be somewhere over towards the hills and were travelling downhill. There was no way they could have been stars, as it was a cloudy night. We were right next to an airport of some kind, but it closes down every evening around 6.00.

Yours faithfully,
Stephen Ray Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs.

Dear Sir,
I am writing to tell you of an experience my mother and father had last year. I was not there at the time, so I am telling you the story as it was told to me.

My mother and father had been visiting my aunts in Billingham, Cleveland, and had set off home at about 11.15 p.m. They were travelling along the Wolviston to Sedgefield road when they saw a massive white bright light about half a mile [800 metres] long hovering over Thorpe Larches, a small village. It was about 1 or 2 miles [1.6 to 3.2 kilometres] away from them and was pulsating about every three seconds. My father had his camera in the back of the car – but he didn't think to take a photograph! When they reached Sedgefield, my father telephoned the local police station. The policeman who answered the telephone had had exactly the same experience the same night – except that the light the policeman saw was moving in the opposite direction.

The next day when we read the newspapers we discovered that there had been other UFO sightings and some people in cars had been chased by UFOs. And several weeks later excavations of an Iron Age settlement were started close to where the UFO was seen.

It was this incident that started my interest in the paranormal.

Yours faithfully,
Jonathan Midgley Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

THE WORLD'S MYSTERIOUS PLACES – 45
Bala Lake, Gwynedd, Wales